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## Technological Universities: an International Perspective on Instructional Support and Collaboration

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## **Technological Universities:**

### **An international perspective on instructional support and collaboration**

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There exists a common endemic characteristic of collaboration among modern international technological universities beyond the marked diversity and localization of each one's mission and vision. Technological universities prioritize collaborative work with students, industries, communities, and cultures. This openness to cooperative enterprise fosters numerous opportunities for innovation, exploration, and experimentation in teaching at technological universities. Their entrepreneurial ethos and emphasis on practice as fundamental to the student learning experience offer a more permeable learning environment between the formal classroom and the professional world. Institutions, such as Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) and Purdue Polytechnic Institute (PPI), are tackling this challenge through a multitude of different pedagogical frameworks: real-world challenges, active learning, innovative curricula, industry collaborations, and international experiences. As technological universities synthesize these frameworks into unique learning environments for students, teachers at these institutions need support as they innovate and change their practices to match changing societal and technological needs.

TU Dublin and PPI are strategic partners that have a decade-long relationship of formalized student and teacher exchanges in tandem with curricular agreements between both institutions. Recently, inclusion of instructional support units provided an opportunity to extend and strengthen this partnership. Beginning with informal conversations at the Polytechnic Summit in 2017, TU Dublin's Learning, Teaching and Technology Centre and Purdue's Center for Instructional Excellence affirmed a desire to share resources, approaches to teaching and learning development, and institutional initiatives that support pedagogical innovation. Upon our first video call, it was apparent that both units had the same expectations for the collaboration and shared the same professional ethos and collegiality.

Initially, both units had little more than shared interests and a willingness to converse. Our initial conversations grew into a framework for exchanging knowledge and experiences, with definable outcomes in mind for both centers. A successful collaboration would rely upon motivating personnel from both units to overcome the obvious barriers (e.g., distance, time zones, cultures) as well as the potential barriers (e.g., interest, availability, logistics). Aspects of both of these barriers could have been insurmountable and the potential collaboration a nonstarter. Therefore, the collaboration was structured so that both units had the ability to choose projects that joined their goals and produced a tangible, scholarly artifact (i.e., presentation or paper).

Our initial collaboration was applying for an Irish Higher Education grant that would have funded a short personnel exchange. The idea was to be embedded in each other's geographical and institutional cultures while working in and with the other unit. We learned there is nothing like applying for a grant with people you have never met to build a relationship and

collaboration. While we were not awarded the grant, we did build relationships through the process with both units undeterred in finding other avenues for our collaboration. Most importantly, we learned that our individual units had expertise supporting instructional development that was mutually beneficial in furthering our institutions' strategic goals.

Purdue University is a highly-regarded research institution that was established 150 years ago as a residential campus. Purdue has quickly and emphatically moved into the online education space. TU Dublin is a highly-regarded technical university with over 130 years of technical education in many buildings across Dublin. TU Dublin is moving away from physically dispersed buildings and developing a more centralized, residential campus at Grangegorman. While our (Purdue) expertise is in face-to-face instructional development, we are trying to scale up our online teaching development to support Purdue's strategic goals. Our TU Dublin colleagues, on the other hand, have expertise in instructional development through online modules and are now looking to implement more face-to-face instructional development activities. Therefore, our collaboration has focused on both units sharing their respective expertise to strengthen instructional development at each institution.

A couple of years ago, TU Dublin invited us to visit and participate in their eLearning Summer School. We took this opportunity to embed two of our personnel for almost two weeks in instructional support activities at TU Dublin. During this time, we had the good fortune to meet with academic developers at other institutions in Dublin, including personnel from the Irish National Forum who developed the "All Aboard Digital Skills" framework. We were struck immediately by their innovative rendering of digital skill development resources in a logical,

navigable map. This framework has influenced our own development efforts envisioning online offerings for instructors who are increasingly engaging in developmental activities through online environments. Since this initial visit, we have had opportunities to co-lead a workshop at TU Dublin on learning spaces via video call as well as co-present on learning spaces at a couple of Irish conferences. We are currently planning a future visit of TU Dublin personnel to Purdue, publishing articles on our collaboration experiences, and strengthening our established collaborative projects.

We are excited about the amazing possibilities and transformative nature of technological universities. Technological universities have always embodied and prioritized collaboration with students, industry partners, and communities. This openness to cooperative enterprises has fostered an opportunity for two international teaching centers, previously unconnected, to collaborate as we support teaching and learning. Even though we connected as units sharing the same values and ethos, this did not guarantee a successful collaboration. From our initial conversations, we identified obvious barriers (e.g., distance, time zones, cultures) and potential barriers (e.g., interest, availability, logistics) to the success of our collaboration. We strategically structured the outcomes of our collaborative work to align with our professional expectations (e.g., publications, presentations, workshops). Ultimately, we attest the reason for the success and sustainability of our international collaboration has been the intrinsic motivation of personnel involved and the value added to our units' and institutions' strategic goals as well as having mutually supportive allies within both institutions.